

Benefits Spotlight

News for *You*. News to *Share* with your Employees.

Managing Stress Helps Your Oral Health, Too

You may not realize it, but medical conditions can influence your oral health in unexpected ways. Take stress, for instance. You might think that stress and anxiety only affect your emotional or mental health, but they have very real consequences on your teeth and mouth, too. Here's a closer look at the links between stress and oral health.

Teeth Grinding

Stress is sneaky, and it can even affect you while you sleep. One of the clearest links between stress and your mouth is teeth grinding (or bruxism, which is the medical term for teeth grinding). Many things can cause you to grind your teeth, but stress is a top cause. Teeth grinding typically happens while you're asleep, so you may not even know you're doing it. But teeth grinding can cause major problems that are hard to ignore, including headaches, jaw pain, and even tooth damage and loss. Mouthguards will help limit these effects (your dentist can even create a custom one for your mouth), but finding ways to control your stress is the best long-term solution.

Jaw Disorders

Jaw disorders, which your dentist or doctor may refer to as temporomandibular disorders, affect the joints that move the bones of your lower jaw. Stress can cause you to clench or hold your jaw tight, which leads the lower jaw bones to become stiff, painful or swollen. When this happens, your jaw can't move as easily and may even make a click when you try to move it.

Stress and Mouth Infections

Stress reduces your body's ability to fight infections, and this includes infections in your mouth. Gum disease is an infection in your gums, and the most severe form of gum disease (known as periodontitis) is the leading cause of tooth loss. Keeping your stress under control will free up your body's resources to fight infection.

Canker Sores

Research has shown a link between canker sores, which are painful ulcers in your mouth. If you struggle with stress and canker sores, there could be a connection.

Talk to your dentist about ways to treat your canker sores, but managing your stress may be the path to keeping canker sores away.

Stress and Bad Habits

Stress not only directly leads to oral health problems, it also makes it more likely that you engage in habits that indirectly harm your mouth. When faced with stress, some people smoke cigarettes, reach for sugary foods or drink alcohol — coping mechanisms that do a lot of damage to your oral health.

It's important to recognize when you're feeling stressed, take a deep breath and seek out healthy, long lasting ways to address it. Going for a walk outside and breathing in fresh air, finding 5 minutes to meditate, talking to a friend or even organizing a closet or drawer in your home are great ways to release your stress in a way that won't cause more harm than good.

Stressed Out? Talk to Your Dentist

We all experience stress, but you don't have to suffer through it alone. Finding an outlet for your stress and anxiety, such as exercise, meditation or counseling, is important. Your dentist is another supportive resource who can help you manage stress and limit its effects on your health. If your dentist notices signs of stress in your mouth during your next visit, be open about talking about it. Your dentist can share ways to help ease stress that will help prevent pain, put you in control and may even save your teeth in the process.

SOURCES:

https://www.deltadentalins.com/oral_health/stressed_out.html

<https://www.healthgrades.com/right-care/oral-health/6-ways-stress-can-affect-your-oral-health>

Is Your Medicine Harming Your Mouth?

All medications — both prescription and over-the-counter — have the risk for side effects. Unfortunately, some medications have side effects that can harm your teeth and gums.

Although the risk of experiencing medication side effects is relatively small, it's important to know your medications' side effects and how to minimize them. Medications will often list common side effects on the packaging or prescription pamphlet, but you can always ask your doctor about the most common side effects associated with any medication.

If you experience any unexpected or concerning health changes as a result of taking a new medication, call your doctor immediately.

Dry Mouth: A Common Side Effect That's More Harmful Than You Think

When it comes to medication side effects that affect your mouth, the most common is dry mouth. Hundreds of medications for all sorts of conditions can cause dry mouth.

People often minimize dry mouth, thinking it's merely an uncomfortable feeling. But dry mouth can lead to larger dental health problems because it decreases the amount of saliva in your mouth. Saliva is an important protector for your whole mouth: It washes away food particles and excess sugar, which helps prevent cavities. Healthy saliva stores also lower your risk for gum disease and oral infections, so it's a big deal when you don't have enough saliva keeping your mouth clean, comfortable and healthy.

Drinking more water and chewing sugar-free gum are quick dry mouth fixes, and your dentist can recommend additional treatments to address it.

From Taste to Tooth Staining: Other Oral Health Side Effects

Although dry mouth is the most common oral health side effect of medications, it's not the only one. Some medicine can cause mouth pain from swollen gums, cold sores or canker sores. Other medications can stain your teeth or affect taste (such as leaving a metallic taste in your mouth). Medicines containing sugar can even increase your risk for cavities.

Your Dentist Can Help Minimize Oral Health Side Effects

It can be challenging to know whether a medication is doing more harm than good when side effects pop up. However, it's important that you do not stop using prescription medication if you're experiencing oral health-related side effects. Call your doctor and explain the side effects you're experiencing, and he or she will work with you to determine if you should change your medication schedule or offer you a different prescription altogether.

It's also important that your dentist knows the medications you're taking. Make sure you share your current list of over-the-counter and prescription medications with your dentist at each visit. If you take several medications, it may be helpful to have a list of them handy so you don't forget any. If you're experiencing side effects that are causing you pain or discomfort in your mouth, your dentist can share ways to relieve them — keeping you safe and comfortable.